

EXHIBIT 1

The Altria Shooting and the Attorney-Client-Public Report

Happy hump day, Board Watchers! RPS just released a “bombshell report” about the tragic events in June that left a Huguenot High School student dead outside of his graduation.

Let’s get into it, starting from the top.

Amari Pollard (19) shot his long-time foe, Shawn Jackson (18), in Richmond’s Monroe Park after Jackson’s graduation at the Altria Theater.

Pollard was quickly arrested on one count of first-degree murder - but “[there \[was\] not sufficient evidence](#)” to charge Pollard for the other murder (Jackson’s stepfather) or for the 5 bystanders (ages 14, 31, 32, 55, and 58) who were shot by stray bullets. (This has fueled speculation that either Jackson, his step dad, or both, were also armed and returning gunfire.)

This incident has been investigated by Richmond Police, VCU Police Departments, and the [FBI](#), “[with support from Virginia State Police and Henrico Police](#).”

The case is being prosecuted by the Commonwealth’s Attorney, Collete McEachin, whose office has kindly asked RPS not to insert themselves into this investigation, for fear that it will jeopardize the upcoming (late February) murder trial.

Instead, our Board - who have quite a reputation for [refusing to yield to higher authority](#) - invited a third party (Sands Anderson) to come investigate the matter for the low, low price of \$25,000 (and counting).

Each Board member had their own motivations for this.

- Second District’s Mariah White - former military - has been talking about RPS’ emergency “[readiness](#)” for years. She is fully convinced that Superintendent Kamras has no safety/crisis/emergency plan/protocol/procedures in place, despite [hundreds of pages](#) of evidence to the contrary. She believes that Kamras “wasn’t ready” for the shooting of Shawn Jackson, and if he doesn’t present ([another?](#)) comprehensive investigation report that lays out those failings, he should be “[suspended from his duties](#).”
- 6th District’s Shonda Harris-Muhammed is “not ok.” She is “not on the school board to fight for [her] life.” She wants to use this report to “strengthen our P’s - practices, our processes, and our policies - to ensure that we do not have this situation.. happen again.” (Honestly - this was a noble goal, but it could not escape the stink of [her long history of manufacturing scandals to tar, feather, and fire the superintendent](#).)
- 4th District’s Jonathan Young has - for months/years - been begging his colleagues to take their disciplinary roles seriously. They [overturn almost all principal-recommended expulsions](#), and create a culture of chaos in schools [where students are not held to the behavioral standards](#) outlined in the [SCORE](#), and principals (like the one we’ll discuss shortly) are set up to fail. This investigation may give him the high-profile platform he craves to say “I told you so!”

- 3rd District's Kenya Gibson is concerned with all the "discrepancies" in the [incident report that the superintendent has provided](#). New details have emerged, and some witnesses have changed their stories, which makes her suspicious. Someone is lying to her. (Kamras? The RPD? She points to a few comic book style villains throughout this months-long discussion.) She wants to hire an auditor (IE her own personal taxpayer-funded private investigator) to find out, and dig up whatever dirt she can use to fire the Superintendent. A damning third party investigation is just the thing she needs to convince her colleagues to approve this new hire.

The remaining Board members echo many of these points - and approve the investigation under the conditions that:

1. It is for informational purposes only, to inform their policy decisions.
2. It is NOT a criminal investigation. They are NOT trying to find someone else to blame.

So they turn over all their privileged documents (academic records, privileged email correspondences) and give the investigators at Sands Anderson law firm access to interview all RPS employees who participated in the graduation, or Shawn's experience in the "homebound" program.

Sands Anderson presents their report a few weeks later in closed session (citing "attorney client privilege.") Then they packed up their report, declined to leave the Board with copies, and went on their merry way.

Half the Board was unsurprised by the findings. (They'd already learned much of this info for free, via the Superintendent's incident report.)

A couple others took to the media to hype the findings as "damning," and suggest that current students' safety was also at risk.

They motioned to make the report public.

RPS legal counsel advised against it.

The Board decided to withhold the entire report citing "attorney client privilege." (There is an "exempt from Virginia Freedom of Information Act" watermark on just about every page of the report.)

Richmond Times Dispatch was the first to file a lawsuit challenging this decision. Tyler Layne and CBS6 quickly sued as well.

All parties involved spent the trial (Friday) rewatching old school board meetings ([my fav!](#)) - except for four witnesses: Jason Kamras, Jonathan Young, Kenya Gibson, Dr Harris-Muhammed. They sat outside the courtroom all day, waiting for their turn to be relevant. Of them, only Kamras ended up testifying. (Chairwoman Stephanie Rizzi testified too, but as a defendant, she was permitted to stay in the courtroom).

The Judge, wearing a blue quarter-zip, matching tie, and an annoyed, impatient scowl, stood at his podium (for all 9 hours!!) while lawyers debated the legal intentions behind the Board's requested audit. Or was it a report? Or an investigation? The Board had used all these terms interchangeably, and caused hours of needless, legal confusion.

Ultimately, the judge reviewed the report himself and ordered RPS to release the full report with "minimal redactions."

Here's what it said:

- Shawn was missing a lot of school. He and his family were “in hiding” after classmates shot up their home in retaliation for... something. (Rumors suggest it was a fatal something for someone.)
- Shawn's primary threat was identified as “Student X” - who sources told investigators had been involved in the fatal shooting of “a family member... [right outside of \[Westover\] Hills Elementary](#)” earlier in the school year. (Further investigating of those connections was well outside the scope of this report, though.)
- Shawn's mom tried to transfer him into a different school (via the [leader-less Safety and Security department](#)) - but decided to finish out the school year with temporary “homebound” instruction instead. This program serves students with serious medical concerns, which Shawn qualified for due to mental illness, a history of “anger/emotional dyscontrol,” and an ongoing threat of “[neighborhood violence](#).”
- Shawn's guidance counselor at Huguenot (HHS) acted as a go-between: relaying his required school assignments, scheduling his in-person testing, and arranging his graduation participation.
- This 10-year school counselor (with 21 years experience in RPS) never told the school's lead counselor, the principal, the safety staff, or any of his teachers that someone is trying to kill Shawn, despite the fact that she is a mandatory reporter for threats of community violence.
- The rest of the school - totally in the dark about all this - made no effort to hide Shawn from his peers when he came to school for end-of-year testing. He actually shared a testing room with “Student X.” Obviously, this alarmed Shawn's mom. She emailed the school with what would end up being an eerily prediction: Kids who “literally tried to kill him” could have been waiting for Shawn in the parking lot.
- When it came time for graduation - mom and counselor decided rehearsals were “too dangerous” for him - but agreed to “squeeze” him in at the very last minute. The counselor sought no permission to waive Homebound rules which prevent those students from participating in school events (like graduations.)
- The student entrance at Altria was patrolled by an “old man” the theater had contracted through RCM. (Neither company participated in this investigation.) At least one staff member confirms seeing a metal detector at this entrance, but it was either off or malfunctioning, because it did not detect the watch on his wrist or other metal items in his pockets. (Pg 417) Witnesses could not confirm whether or not all students were searched upon arrival, or whether or not the security guard maintained his post at this entrance throughout the event.
- Shawn jumped in line (out of sequence), got his diploma, joined his peers in a march into Monroe Park, where he was fatally shot.
- HHS Principal “Ghost” Gilstrap is described as being entirely checked out, and baffled by the shock and outcry over Shawn attending the graduation. He allegedly told Jonathan Young “there was another student on that stage who shot and killed someone.”
- The counselor refused follow up interviews.

- The principal - now employed by the VDOE - refused all interviews.
- The mother declined to speak with investigators, who opted not to press the matter out of respect for her grief.

Basically, this \$25k report tells us:

“...[Shawn’s] participation in graduation occurred without any consideration of or adherence to required authorizations, and without proper vetting and consideration of the safety concerns that were known by several members of HHS.”

The Superintendent reached a similar conclusion in his July 20, 2023 incident report. That's why Section VI, Recommendation #1, reads:

“RPS does not currently have a consistent approach to assessing whether students should attend graduation in person... We need a clearer and more rigorous protocol to make these decisions going forward. Towards that end, we recommend drafting a written set of guidelines that will assist principals in making this decision, including a process to escalate particularly complicated cases...”

The \$25k report also tells us there are “silos” of information and communication in RPS. But we [knew that already](#), too:

*“Departments work in silos with little communications between and among staff teams”
Council of Great City Schools’ RPS Audit; June 2018*

Nevertheless, this report is damning... just, not for the reasons Board blowhards told local media.

“My God, this is such a messy story.”

The real shoe drops around page [251 of the 1132 pages](#) of interview transcripts and staff emails the investigators compiled.

Chief Academic Officer of Secondary Instruction, Solomon Jefferson, has just laid out a “disastrous” story of the start of the 2022-23 school year, when RPS’ central office was so full of “high profile vacancies” (resignations) that their organizational chart looked like Swiss cheese.

Solomon was a principal director at the time, managing a small portfolio of principals.

Make that TWO portfolios of principals.

The George Wythe principal had abruptly died from a heart attack the week before school started, so one of Solomon’s fellow principal directors quickly moved into that role to grab the wheel and keep that “plane” in the air.

This high-stakes juggling act gets even harder when School Board Chairwoman Harris-Muhammed and Vice Chair Gibson rush to hold a special meeting. They tell the media they want to discuss recently released SOL scores, but really the meeting is a coup to throw out the school division's curriculum the week before school starts. Gibson allies ([6 very vocal teachers](#)) step to the public-comment-podium, one-by-one, and swing hard at the curriculum-piñata the overworked/understaffed academic team have dedicated years of their life to adapting to Virginia standards. They say it’s too expensive! (It’s free.)

It's not aligned to state standards! (No curriculum is.) And that it's too hard for our students! (Aka, they wanted lower expectations for students who - thanks some teachers' "implicit bias" - only receive on-grade level instruction [38% of the time.](#))

14 other teachers and 5 principals showed up to counter their colleagues. They [call this proposal](#) "nothing more than a way to stroke the egos of those who think they know better."

But we don't need to rehash all of that now - the point is that the whole thing was bullshit, and it was too much for the weary academic team to bear.

RPS loses their Director of Curriculum Development, Autumn Nabors; and Josh Bearman, their Science Instruction Specialist. (Maybe that's why only 25% of our 8th graders passed their science SOLs last year?? Ok ok, sorry, no more rehashing.)

This stunt had wiped out the Academic Office, leaving Solomon to largely fend for himself alongside a skeleton crew.

Then he got word that his principal director buddy, J Austin, up-and-quit after just a few weeks of serving as the temporary principal at George Wythe High School.

In a desperate attempt to fill this vacancy, RPS pulled from Huguenot High School, begging their assistant principal (Kevin Olds) to take on this "Herculean" job.

Solomon was overseeing this transition, Austin's portfolio of principals, and his own, when his boss, Tyra Harrison, Director of Teaching and Learning, (🌱 note:and another aggrieved underling) "went after" the Chief of Staff, Michelle Hudacsko, and set off another wave of resignations.

Tyra "was supposed to be leading the department in the absence of a Chief Academic Officer." The last CAO, Tracy Epp, had resigned a couple of months earlier; but really, the position had been vacant long before then. (Epp had been out on FMLA.)

Epp was the second of three cabinet members [the School Board would drive out](#) of the division: [COO Gonzalez](#), [CAO Epp](#), [COS Hudacsko](#).

Rumor has it that Tyra had been denied that CAO position, so she filed unsubstantiated allegations of abuse against Michelle Hudacsko, took her own FMLA break, then (per a source) "quit before she could be fired." (Obligatory note: Tyra's perspective is not represented in this report, and I'm sure she'd have much to say about these characterizations [UPDATE, she describes this a "very poor representation of this story."](#))

Solomon tells investigators that Tyra and Tracy "were there, [but] they weren't really present..." which left "other folks holding the bag."

As the division leadership dominos fell, there was a frantic re-aligning of existing academic staff who "stepped up to keep everything afloat." (Filling one vacancy, creating another.)

- Manager of Mathematic Instruction, Cassandra Bell, moved up to be Director of Curriculum.
- Exceptional Ed Director, Ranesha Parks, stepped up to serve as the Chief Wellness Officer.
- Solomon agreed to serve as the Chief Academic Officer - as long as he shared the role with another member of the academic team. He and Leslie Wiggins went halves. She became CAO of Elementary Education; he became CAO of Secondary Education.

Solomon's first months on the job were plagued with emergencies. You saw the headlines. Guns and knives on campuses. Truant students getting shot in school parking lots. Another was shot at a bus stop.

(A reactive School Board used these incidents to bully the Security Director into resigning, though they could not or did not find/share any evidence of his wrongdoing.)

SO. Let's connect Dots.

Shawn's mom alleged that HHS students shot up her home in Fall 2022. She asked the Security department to transfer Shawn to another school, but that process went nowhere because there was no security director.

So mom works up an alternate graduation plan with the HHS counselor instead: Homebound Instruction. She tells the counselor all about the threats to Shawn's life, but the counselor never brings this up in weekly meetings with school leadership because...

1. HHS' assistant principal left to become the reluctant principal of George Wythe; and
2. The HHS principal was totally checked out and would not manage his staff, defying the direction (and pleas) of new, novice, CAO II, Solomon. "Ghost" Gilstrap (as one HHS parent dubbed him) opted to [court a WaPo journalist](#) and shop around his resume to the VDOE instead.

Don't get me wrong. The counselor still should have told someone! But the responsibility of managing Shawn's (complicated) path to graduation never should have landed solely on the shoulders of any Virginia School Counselor. Our state's "standards of quality" (quite a misnomer) expects these counselors to juggle a student caseload of more than 300 students - which far exceeds the [250](#)-caseload limit that national experts recommend. Solomon calls Ms Harris "one of our hardest working counselors" a calling her "insightful" and "empathetic." Mom showers her with praise. Nevertheless - per this report - she messed up big time.

Someone from central office probably should have thought to ask - to identify particularly challenging cases and offer support. But the woman (Tyra) responsible for the 2023 graduations was a no-show after "about a month" on the job - and the guy (Solomon) forced to fill her shoes was "actually doing 3 jobs" and didn't even "have a high school background."

Obviously, this was NOT ideal.

Solomon expresses a lot of compassion for the bind the Superintendent was in - but he still called this situation "ludicrous."

"I stepped into the complete role in January after Jason -

He really had no choice.

We know it's ludicrous.

I mean, it's hard enough to do one job and RPS, but at the time you really didn't have any choices.

This was Solomon's *first rodeo*, and - to mix metaphors - there were only seconds left on the clock.

Shawn was learning from home. His mom was working really damn hard to keep him on track to graduate. His counselor - showed too much “sympathy” - and looked the other way as he submitted incomplete assignments, and neglected others altogether. The two of them were determined to keep their heads down, sneak Shawn in the side door, and come-hell-or-high-water, they were going to see this kid graduate in June.

I’m sure it didn’t help that the Chief Talent Officer position was vacant this whole time, **so RPS really had nobody focused on rebuilding this Swiss-cheese workforce.** (Well. There was a CTO part of the time. She was just out on FMLA. The rest of the time this role was vacant.)

The internal folks who stepped up are - as far as I’m concerned - goddamn heros. But they were also inexperienced in their new roles, and had no real mentors.

It’s no wonder Solomon describes these months as “traumatic, in so many ways.”

What about Jason Kamras? Where was the Superintendent?

He was working from a desk he’d set up just inside the front doors of George Wythe. Aging by the second. Hoping to single-handedly stop the next tragedy from unfolding.

He could not.

Instead, weeks later, he’d stand hopelessly at the edge of Monroe Park, in his graduation robes, protecting the lifeless body of Shawn Jackson.

Now look. All I have to work from is a transcript. But I imagine this is the point in Solomon’s story where the investigator takes off her glasses, sits back in her chair, and rubs her temples.

Investigator: What do you attribute that sort of vacuum of leadership to? Like, was it just because of a bad series of people moving on, and sicknesses, and FMLA, and deaths? Or was it just kind of more systemic than that?

Solomon: Well.

Yeah.

It was School Board.

Specifically: vacancies created by the School Board’s “toxic” “mean-spirited” leadership in 2022 (then-Chairwoman Harris-Muhammed and Vice Chair Gibson), and the many cumulative failures of the remaining staff who were unprepared, overworked, and/or bickering among themselves.

“I’m concerned.

I’m concerned about burnout.

I’m concerned about efficiency.

We have seen crisis after crisis in this school system, [and]

I... worry that what we’re going to see is the remaining cabinet officials just buckling under the extra work that they have to carry.

I'm concerned about the problems that we need addressed in the school system being addressed if there's nobody there to do it."

Me. July, 2022

Sigh.

I told you so.